

Your Dental Offices: Design & Build Them Right

By Laura Bordeaux, ASID FX Dental & Medical Interiors Design Specialist

Are you building a new dental office or upgrading an existing one? Here's the comprehensive, cost-effective way to do it, using successful strategies design professionals have developed over years of dental-medical experience.

The best team includes:

- Architect and/or* and Interior Designer
- Mechanical Engineer/s
- Reputable Dental Supply Company
- Specialty Consultants, e.g. Graphic Designers, Banking-Finance Experts
- Landlord or Building Manager

Meet with each team member separately to establish each member's expertise, fees, and responsibilities. Once you have signed contracts with each, set a group meeting to determine each member's interface with the others. In this meeting, a project schedule should be set.

What is the project sequence? What is each team member's scope of responsibility?

Do NOT hire a builder until your team has created a **comprehensive set of floor plans with complete specifications**. This is the only way to know your true build-out cost. Then bid out your project to three recommended General Contractors to obtain competitive pricing.

Landlord

1. If this is a move to a new location, do some homework. Web-search commercial real estate sites to discover local fair market values. Contracting with a commercial property broker means they work to secure you the best site at a favorable rate. Their fee is frequently paid by the building owner.
2. View potential spaces and take photos of the existing conditions. Ask your Design Professional to advise you on the building condition. Request past heating and electric bills. Find out what services and amenities the Landlord provides; for example, trash pick-up, public restrooms, parking, and exterior lighting. Ask about signage dimensions and locations. Are these amenities included in the quoted rent or billed additionally each month?
3. The Landlord or Building Manager will provide you with existing floor plans, including any mechanicals build-outs or improvements by previous tenants. (Ideally they will be in an AutoCAD format.) Your design team can provide you with accurate square footage of the space once they have surveyed the site and updated the plans to reflect true dimensions. You can then negotiate the per-square-foot rental price.
4. In these tight economic times, you can negotiate for liberal build-out allowances of 12 to 18 percent. The Landlord pays the agreed-upon percentage directly to your builder. The Landlord may also suggest that their builder handle your construction. This route offers you less control over costs, because the Landlord will not usually reveal to you the subcontractors' bids.
5. You can also request as much as six months rent-free while the team develops plans and specs to build your space.

Architect and/or Interior Designer, Engineer/s for Electrical, Plumbing, Mechanical

The scope of their work includes the following phases:

I. Task Programming

- Collect information on your equipment, square footage, work flow, number of operatories, lab requirements, sterilization locations, restrooms, kitchen, etc.
- Verify existing site conditions, which may include site-measuring space.

II. Schematic Design

- Provide you with layout options that maximize the flow and function of the site spaces.
- Select finishes and materials for walls, ceilings, flooring, cabinetry, counters, and operator chairs.
- Develop preliminary design for check-in/check-out counters, and any additional cabinetry not purchased from a Dental Supply Company.
- Help you develop project budgets.

III. Contract Documents

- Develop plans and specs. These are submitted to the city or town to obtain building permits and also submitted to selected General Contractors for bids.
- Plans and specs include:
 - Compliances/Requirements
 - Demolition of existing site structures
 - New wall location/s
 - New ceiling layout (including ceiling-mounted AC and heat vents, lighting and dental equipment placement).
 - Cabinet and counter details
 - Flooring and wall finish plans
 - Furniture and equipment placement plans

Note: The design team needs to establish which schematics/plans in phase II and III will be supplied to the design professional's by the Dental Supply Company. For example these plan details may include: ceiling mounted light fixtures, X-ray equipment, electrical, plumbing & vacuum requirements.

Upon plan completion:

- Solicit bids from three recommended General Contractors.
- Schedule a pre-bid walk-through at the site, at which you're Architect, Interior Designer and Engineer/s answer questions the G.C.s ask regarding the plans.
- Allow G.C.s ten business days to return the bid.
- Then you and your design team meets to review the submitted bids.
- Award the bid to the selected G.C.
- The G.C. or Design Professional submits your plans to city/town building officials.
- The city/town has a set amount of time to review the plans, ask for clarifications then issue your project a building permit.
- After the plans are approved, the build-out can begin.

The G.C., Design Professional/s, Client, Dental Supplier, Graphic/Signage Designer, Landlord, and any other team members then establish a project construction and completion schedule.

***Note: Only state-licensed design professionals can prepare sign & stamp plans to obtain the required building permits.** Your Architect and/or Interior Designer act as your agent/s in checking on the quality and accuracy of installations done by the G.C.'s tradespeople.

- These local professionals go to your building site to review job progress.
- You may hire out-of-state consultants, but you are required to have at least one state-licensed Design Professional on your team to take responsibility for the project.

These guidelines facilitate a strong, cohesive project team; reduce cost; and streamline the Renovate/Build process, yielding a handsome new Dental facility.

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